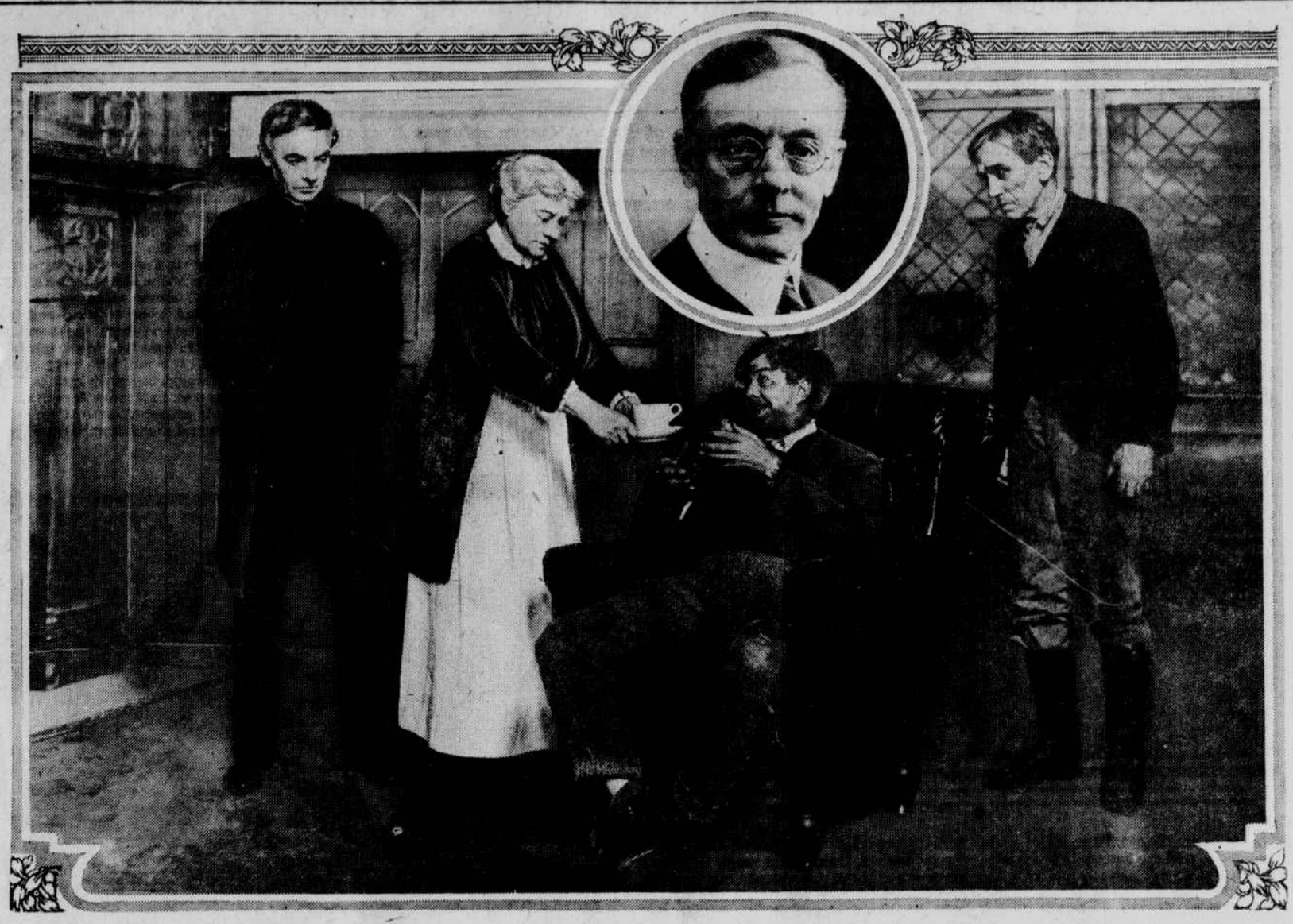
# HARRY DAVENPORT LOOKS BACK OVER FIFTY YEARS

## Youngest Member of Famous Theatrical Family Tells of His Days as a Juvenile, His Development in Histrionic Art and Future of the Drama

Scene from "Thank You," in which Harry Davenport (at left) is playing after fifty years on the stage. Others, from left to right, are Helen Judson, Frank McCormack and Albert Hyde. The inset shows a closeup of Mr. Davenport off stage.



**By LAWRENCE REAMER.**

EVEN with the bone spectacles it seems impossible. They are, of course, no longer a sign of age. They are rather the ostentatious symbol of the *intelligentsia*. If they are on the bridge of a tenderly feminine nose they may intimate a spirit of revolt. They assuredly do so when a fringe of bobbed hair falls menacingly over the brow above them.

But this is a masculine nose and, moreover, a classic one, even if it is somewhat reduced from the scale that the most rigid standard would impose. It is a part of the general Davenport profile, which always deferred to the fashion of antiquity whether it were famous or not.

Fanny of the ilk was among the best known actresses of her day. She would have been noted as a beauty in any day from Helen of Troy's down.

This is Harry, youngest of the family, that was of the theater purple in this country.

"I have really been for fifty years on the stage," he tells the reporter for THE NEW YORK HERALD. "This winter I am celebrating the first half century of my career as an actor."

His figure is so slim and the skin so fresh and clear. Where is the joker?

### *Real Child of the Stage;*
### *Began His Career at Five*

"To be sure," says the actor with a smile, "I was only 5 when I acted in Philadelphia the first time. There is the program with me as *Damon's* child. On that same program, too, is the family of my wife. I was a theater child. My family were actors. Anybody who knows our theater remembers what a part E. L. Davenport played in its life then. So it was the most natural thing in the world that I should begin to act so soon as I was old enough. Once I started it was just as natural that I should keep it up. 'Damon and Pythias' was a popular play in those days, and I played often the part in which I made my debut.

"Whenever an actor came along with a play that required children it was my time to appear. So I played often in 'Jack Cade' with my father and with John McCullough, and even more frequently in 'Rip Van Winkle.' I have always heard that when Joseph Jefferson went to London he had Dion Boucicault rewrite his version of this play, since he was afraid that the rather crude drama he had been acting here would need some changes for the English public. Boucicault then put in the children. That was a lucky thing for the theater kiddies here, as no end of them made their bow to the public as the youngsters in that piece."

There came a brief interim when Mr. Davenport might not have acted at all had not such an operatic success swept over this country that it was impossible for the public to get enough of it. He was too old to play children any longer and too young for the youths of the drama of his day.

But along came "H. M. S. Pinafore." There was no giving the public too much of it. Adult performers appearing at night, church choir singers exhibiting their fine voices and their amateurish acting, even children in the afternoons, had to organize "juvenile" troups.

Harry Davenport thus became a "juvenile" opera singer and at the age of thirteen appeared as *Sir Joseph Porter* in a children's company organized by John Ford of Baltimore, a famous impresario of his time and of that Southern city. One of his granddaughters-in-law, Blanche Chapman, is at the Gaiety Theater now in "Golden Days."

### *Children's 'H. M. S. Pinafore' Company*
### *Met With Success at Wallack's*

"George Denman, who was a popular comedian in comic opera, sang the *Admiral* at the night performances in Philadelphia," Mr. Davenport said as he smiled at the reminiscence, "and I tried to imitate him in my childish way. We all were children in that play. Some of the companies were made up of so-called 'juveniles' who were by no means entitled to that name. We really were young, though. That was in the late 70s. I could really boast of being a metropolitan actor then, for the company came to the old Wallack's at Thirteenth street and played a successful engagement there—in the afternoon of course."

After a while the juvenile days were over and Mr. Davenport was old enough to play a youth of seventeen plausibly even if he were younger. So he got a part in "Hazel Kirke"—the country boy created originally by Joseph Frankau—and with his brother Edgar, who played the hero, started a long tour in a third company of Steele Mackaye's famous old play. Some of the young actors in this troup were so good that after a while they were elevated to membership in other companies from the Madison Square that were acting this same piece. Among these were the two Davenport boys who had such a famous father and assuredly ought to be able to act.

Lots of things happened in the years that intervened until this winter. Then there was a wonderful performance of a clergyman in "Thank You" that set everybody to talking about the actor who added such a fine portrait to the limited gallery that really pictures life and humanity on the stage.

Of course it was the same Harry Davenport who has acted in "Lightnin'" and "Three Wise Fools," but there had been no such opportunity in those plays. Many seasons of many kinds of experiences produced the mellow skill that could realize such a type of man in the theater.

There were all sorts of preparation for the actor. Comic opera, musical plays, the cinema as actor and director—all these employments added their share to his complete control of the powers that an actor ought to possess.

"I was a theater director for several years in Philadelphia after the retirement of George Holland, who had such a successful stock company for some years at my father's theatre," Mr. Davenport said when narrating all the things he had done that helped him to his present day achievements, "and when I discovered that Mr. Holland was going to retire I took over the theatre. I had a long experience in my appearances with Frank Mayo, who was such a fine actor and played so many parts well, although the public would always make him act 'Davy Crockett' and 'The Streets of New York.' He had a wonderful company of thirty-five of the finest actors he could collect, and that year cost him a fortune. He played a repertoire, 'The Three Musketeers,' 'Macbeth' and half a dozen other classic plays.

"It took the Saturday night performances, however, of 'Davy Crockett' to make the money to pay salaries with. Mayo was the first *d'Artagnan* I ever saw and he was a fine *Macbeth*. There were the two roles, however, in which the public most wanted to see him, the trapper and the New York boy of the old play."

Joseph Grismer took the young actor to play for several seasons in "The New South" and with him he served his apprenticeship in Western stock company methods. In Chicago he acted for several seasons in a company that produced such works as "The Burgomaster," and a variety of operettas in the main written by local musicians and librettists, of whom Frank Pixley, creator of the libretto of "The Prince of Pilsen," was one.

"Think of the opportunities a young actor got in that day," he said, "for George Lederer brought me to the Casino, where I was the first *Harry Bronson* in 'The Belle of New York.' I went to London with the company, but came back after a year, as I longed for my own country. I acted at the Casino in 'The Rounders,' singing, too. Think of that as a means of learning one's art!

"But there was still more to come. After a while the moving pictures made their appearance and I was soon a director. I acted in them first, which gave me the experience to become a director.

"Yes, I know what you're going to ask. There is not the least doubt of it. Any intelligent actor can learn a lot from acting before the camera. I don't know a single respect in which his art cannot be improved. Perhaps he cannot learn about the management of the voice, since he never has to speak. But with the sight before him of every gesture and expression he can tell just in what respect he ought to change—if he ought to. I have tried to convince more than one of my managers that they could insure much better performances if they would have pictures taken of their plays and make the actors watch them, and thus learn their own defects in the parts they are acting.

"Wait. I know the other question, too. I don't think the movies have been of any disadvantage to the drama unless it is that they have so much increased the number of actors. There was during the most prosperous days of the picture industry a tremendous influx of men and women to the camera theater. Not all of them sought the work. They were quite often brought into it by others. Directors who were looking for a type would stop a man or woman in the street and ask if he or she wanted to play in the pictures. Usually they did when the pay was say $15 a day and they were earning perhaps twice as much every week. No wonder they took the jobs. That was easy pay for just happening to be the physical type that a director was looking for.

"Of course when the bottom dropped out of the movies and there was no longer any work for these people, did they go back to what they had been doing before? Not on your life! They were artists by this time. They had to keep before the public. So they turned to the speaking stage. Just to think of the way this increased the competition among the actors, this army suddenly decided that it also had to find a place in the theater. It makes employment for the actor harder than ever to find. It makes it more than ever difficult for the youngsters to find the practice necessary to learn to act. But only in that respect has the cinema been of disadvantage to the stage."

Like all his colleagues, whether they ever acted in his plays or not, Mr. Davenport deplores the limited amount of Shakespeare supplied to-day by the managers. He has even thought of the horrendously modern method of giving the plays in the dress of this day as an experiment in order that the public might at least become accustomed to the language and by this knowledge learn so to love the texts that the desire for them would lead to a new interest in the Elizabethan dramatist.

"I remember my father's *Hamlet* only vaguely, as I was very young when I saw him," was one line of the actor's memories, "but I have never seen any *Hamlet* that compared—not with one of the old timers, mind you, but an actor who has just retired. That is Forbes Robertson. He is, in my opinion, incomparable in action, reading and intelligence, as the hero. There is one important respect in which he differs from the old timers. I saw them all in my day, and, like everybody else who had a chance to study their work and is willing to tell the truth about it, I must admit that there was a certain amount of scene chewing. It was indispensable to the plays of that time, and it was indispensable to the manner in which they played Shakespeare.

"But there were different kinds of scene chewing. The best actors did it very skillfully and artistically, and there was just enough of it to add point to their scenes. Some of the bad old boys, on the other hand, just reveled in it for its own sake. They loved to get hold of something which, like the old actor in 'Trelawney of the Wells,' they could get their teeth into. Naturally that had to go with the improvement in acting, but it must be said that the public used to enjoy it in the old days. It was all a part of the theater of their day. There is no suggestion of it, however, in the Shakespeare which Forbes Robertson gives to the world in his *Hamlet*."

In spite of all the changes in the lot of the actor during Mr. Davenport's fifty years, which is practically Mr. Davenport's life, he is one of the optimists that believe conditions to-day are better on the whole than they ever were, just as so many other professions find the pursuit of life and happiness somewhat easier and considerably more comfortable.

## One of His Pleasantest Memories Is a Child's Performance of 'H. M. S. Pinafore'—His Most Recent Appearances Are in 'Thank You' and 'Lightnin''

### *Has His First Week's Salary,*
### *All Except One Lonely Cent*

"And don't let anybody persuade you," he said to the reporter with a twinkle back of those spectacles which are the strongest suggestion of his age than any view of this smiling fresh faced half centenarian provides, "that the actor is not provident. I have to this day the first week's salary that I ever drew.

"My father gave it to me in a five dollar gold piece and the other five dollars in every denomination of money from a one cent piece up. And I have every cent of it to-day but one. The one cent piece was in some inconceivable way lost. How it happened to this day I don't know. I cannot explain any more how I happened to misplace that piece than how I contrived to hold on to the $9.99.

"I will admit it was pretty hard sometimes. It took on more than one occasion lots of self-control not to spend the money. It would have helped a lot on several occasions. But I still have that first salary of $10, minus the one cent. So don't say that actors are not provident."

E. L. Davenport and his wife left descendants to carry on their fame.

Harry's sister, Fanny Davenport, stood for a long time at the head of her profession, acting as the star in some of the most successful of the Sardou dramas.

Edgar was a popular leading man until his death a few years ago.

Blanche Davenport became a singer and as Mrs. William Seymour retired from the stage soon after her marriage. Harry Davenport and Mrs. Seymour have children that keep in the family path.

# Titled English Women in Trade Cater to Their Own Class

## Many of Their Little Shops Are Bound to Fail Because They Ignore Taste of the Multitude and Profiteers

**By M'L. YORKE.**

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New York Herald Bureau, London, Dec. 17.

THERE is a feature of peculiar interest in the London world of little businesses—of one woman shops—recently invaded by matrons, young and older, among the financially reduced aristocracy of England. These novices have actually assembled their stocks with the avowed intention to cater among themselves—among their own small clique. This is a unique idea in business. It is, doubtless, more entertaining to thus play at shopkeeping than it would be actually to serve the masses; that disagreeable element, *common contact*, is eliminated; but what of the outcome—can it possibly pay?

This scheme is known, to put it crudely, as "taking in each other's washing"; and the idea is usually referred to in joke as a mad utopian method to be resorted to when all else fails. Surely the situation is not so bad as this? Times are hard and business "dull as ditch water," but the end is not in sight—these women have only just begun. This method suggests a curious game without a starting point or base.

### *Little London Shops*
### *Run by and for the Titled*

Something like this was to have been expected, that is if it had ever been anticipated, seriously, that titled folk would stoop to the buying and selling of goods. These women nevertheless have fallen naturally into their own groove; this is the result of living the isolated life; they have been shut away behind hedges from the rest of the English people, they have scarcely known their own London and they have not wandered far from the borders of their own estates. Where would they go in an emergency except in the same old track—the same rut?

A chasm yawns between the taste of the elect and the taste of the multitude. (These class distinctions are made for purposes of argument and are based on those accepted long ago in England.)

It is this very failure to grasp the wants of the other half that narrows down the clientele—that drives the elect back upon themselves in this grave moment. Were they to get together a stock such as would please the passerby (who might be upper middle class, lower middle class or working class—with innumerable lesser distinctions) this stock would seem, according to the unique and elegant and cultured taste of the peerage, like making game of their own venture. And this is quite understandable. Almost any one among this group of aristocrats in trade is capable of exclaiming, under her breath, "How truly horrible!" meaning the taste exhibited by some perfect paragon of virtue in the middle class. And she would be right. Most of the clothes, furniture and what not collcted by people without educated taste are, in their entirety, *horrible*.

The ways of these inexperienced business people must be, however, a source of positive anguish to that guild of far famed shopkeepers who are said to make up the very nation. Trade, to these fashionable novices, is an impulse; keeping shop is a "stunt"; the entire stock is a "tryout," and who knows but what the sequel is a worry.

### *Stock of the Beautiful*
### *For the Woman Beautiful*

Most of the articles on sale are de luxe—a very precious collection of things beautiful for the house beautiful and the woman beautiful. They have been evolved or imported with an eye to an almost certain customer—or shall it be a client? And they are priced accordingly. The still rich seem never to require commodities, and, happily, not all of the titled are down to the last ha'penny. Personal friends, at any rate, can be counted on as purchasers—who else could buy? This is the impression one gets in these establishments. And certainly that solid English public (which is the upper middle class), with its unbreakable backbone—its more than vertebra—could not be moved to the purchase of such unconscionable frivols.

And so the peerage keeps shop for the peerage. But will the end be ironic? Will the peerage be driven eventually to welcome in the profiteer? For a profiteer could be educated to purchase this sort of stuff if once convinced that such an act was one resembling those of the ruling class. He has not, however, been asked in yet. Instead here is altruism—a dear, sweet, unbusiness-like business venture; an anachronism, a spun glass house in dream street ready to fall beneath the first competitor's blow. The grave danger to the owner of the very select small shop is the minority of purchasers compared to that vast purchasing power—the well to do middle class.

No outsider can know how the leisured classes (whom many prefer to call the idle rich) felt at the first prospect of working for a living. To women particularly who have been sheltered and protected the change from security and desired obscurity to a glaring workaday world is unimaginable. The brutality of it sinks in and grinds like the Japanese dagger. Who shall say what were their arguments and with what a struggle these were pushed aside? Or how they came—and even with a certain graciousness—to accent such a bitter fate as "trade"? Then why did they decide in favor of buying and selling—upon money changing and haggling? This that had been for long the symbol of all that was ordinary.

It is conceivable that being master instead of slave—or employee—has much to do with the decision. A shop meant management, and here the women of the leisured classes are all at home. With accustomed dignity they are accepting the situation whether or not it has come up to their ideal. They are overflowing with enthusiasm, and they forge ahead as if the daily turnover were the one vital thing left in life, as indeed it may be. They mean to succeed. Theirs is the conquering spirit. These mere beginners in their little shops are of the governing classes—ancient stock. From a long line of the restrained and silent—the English. The world has not been let into their secret, nor will it be—but the world has eyes.

This is not a pathetic tale, but a statement of facts and acts which these very people were to face and to perform after the great war had shattered the structure of social life for this generation at any rate.

And is the present position of the peerage one of actual poverty? What is poverty? Great numbers of them are known to be losing and spending heavily through excessive taxation all along the route. Some are feeling this more than others; some are decidedly poor; some are becoming penniless. Nevertheless, many of them have not yet begun to count postage stamps. The majority still think in sufficient guineas to almost maintain the homes they've been accustomed to. It may be quite as bad to be without a guinea as without a penny.

### *Post-War Prices Stun*
### *Even a Purchaser Peer*

Articles de luxe when offered for sale to the rich and on a purely friendly basis take on tremendous value. Their exclusiveness added to the degree of friendship, plus the assumed wealth of the purchaser, brings prices up by leaps and bounds. The temerity that can add on pounds where even pence spell profit is part of that chill society training that fits a woman for emergencies; this is an attainment, but it points at times to success and at other times to impending ruin. The prices for the not necessary articles of apparel, adornment and decoration, which it is usual to collect in the first hand movement in the direction of self-support, are recognized to be not alone high but beyond the dreams of avarice.

Fortunately, in consideration of these very high prices there is not the least pressure brought to bear. Besides, the charity bazaar attitude would be in bad taste. The showroom suggests, more or less, a small private view. Some one in attendance sits in a far corner, usually, writing or reading at a desk. The choice stock may be examined without interference or question. The answer to inquiries is more casual than otherwise and drifts to the weather, the latest novel or to the Premier's last politica; "gymnastic," according to the type of person left in charge.

These little shops are not elaborate; they are the simplest of their sort in any country. The certainty of a clientele makes advertising and such like superfluous; besides, display has never been a mark of the true aristocrat. The owners have not followed the regulation French paneled elegance, nor that Munich decoration which abounds so lavishly on the Continent, nor is there such a straining after modernity as in New York, nor toward the faddish touch of the American one woman shop. Citron colored distemper is a well liked wall in gray London, or simple whitewash—"limewash," it is called. This, with the quaint architecture often found, stamps the shop "English" and in characteristic good taste.

The almost persistent non-appearance of the owner has been remarked upon. She avoids the encounter—the publicity. She tends to remain in the background, where, unfortunately, like all the world, she cannot escape the commercial traveler. She does not dress the part as the French always have, and as Americans incline to—unless they overdress it. The personal sampling of her own wares would tend toward advertising and transgress the code.

These poor-rich are showing more than average economy; they are canny. The old family nurse, the French maid and even the parlor maid do duty in the shop. This follows a universal French method of employing all the poor relatives. In some of the best and largest establishments in Paris Tante Marie and Cousine Mathilde wrapped in the inevitable shoulder shawl act as buffers to keep out the merely curious.

Accompany the writer in retrospect to one improvised showroom on a top floor known in London as an "upper part." Here coats are shown with peasant lines and trimmings; one is sold to almost every inquirer by persuasive Mimi: she stands "pat" to the crack of doom, overwhelmed with sympathy for her Madame. "Oh, no, ze lady herself? she is nevere here. She stop at home, where she make all ze cloak—always—always—pauvre Madame!" Drearily she tells the tale. And so does violent pedaling on a machine overhead in another establishment, where the daughters are known to design, evolve and finish the stock throughout.

### *Sympathetic and Generous*
### *Ways of Titled Trades Folk*

And in this little world of the one time great there is a second marked dependence on one another and a determination to stand shoulder to shoulder which comes out in their trick of showing, advertising and selling each other's wares. This is sympathetic and generous, and quite as beautiful as ill-advised. Now Cavalier's capes by the Countess Courtley, for example, are an "exhibit" repeated in many showrooms. Sold primarily in the Countess's own establishment around the corner, they are nevertheless among the dresses at Lady Liklisale's, and draped on the screen after a design by the Hon. Mrs. Happen, who came by her art entirely by accident. The Hon. Mrs. Happen makes room among her own furniture, not far off, for the paints, powders and perfumes of Lady Beautiful, who sells her own, of course, and wedges in all the lovely new things made from old lace by the Fanfare girls. Lady Advertisit has an amazingly generous way of mentioning all the unique things her friends have got together to the exclusion of her own pet scheme—the shawl remade.

Very bad business! Even the most choice and elusive object becomes hackneyed if displayed perpetually. If the honorable toy horses made in her very own studio by the Honorable Honoria Hobby are seen to rock on every counter the most assiduous collector of toys will pass them by. And even that stickler for headdresses, Lady Topper, might be tempted to appear bareheaded after encountering all the weird faces of countless Milbank millinery blocks, each with its filet, or bandeau, or headdress, or veil. When Mrs. Flutterby Croesus sets out with purse-strings flying she has a narrow eye for business and another quite as narrow for the individual touch.

The little shops of the peerage are in danger. The flimsiest will go under, of course. The better sort will survive and expand, because their owners and directors will have learned their trade.